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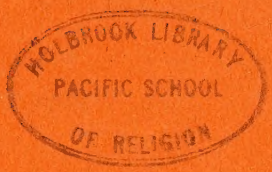


# India Cultures Quarterly

*1961 QUARTER FOUR*

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*Editor :* Dr. R. D. Immanuel
Leonard Theological College
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**Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, M. P.**

**No. 19** **FOURTH QUARTER 1961** **No. 4**


## *Hindu Vratas ( Fasts )*

*( A Sociological Study )*


*Prof. Gupta, Dept. Sociology, Jabalpar University*


**Introduction:**

*Vratas* in Hindu religion occupy a very important place; much more important than in any of the religions of the world. Although we find fasts ( vratas ) in almost every religion except Zoroastrism which forbade them later on, among Hindus vratas are still observed with regularity and according to the rules prescribed. These vratas, play a very important role as a means of social control, to solve many social problems, to inculcate good virtues in man, to keep away the greed from the faster, to keep man spiritual, honest, generous, kind and cosmopolitan, if observed in their true spirit. It is very interesting to note the number of Hindu vratas. M. N. Gopinath Kaviraj lists about 1622 vratas in his edited book 'Vratkosh' [1]; Hemdri on Vratas also mentions about 700 vratas for Hindus which looks very strange to those in other religions which have only a few fasts.

**Meaning and Significance of Fasts :**

To understand vratas in their full significance we must also look into the interpretations which other religions have

1. The Sarsvati Bhavan Series, in 1929.

made of fasts or fasting. We find the word 'fast' in English language which is synonymous wich the word 'vrata'. Although there is a vast difference in the meaning of these two words, 'vrata' ( Sanskrit ) and 'fast' ( English ) we can only briefly discuss the etymological meaning of fast or fasting.

Fast ( old Teutonic 'fastejan', "keep away" or "observe" hence 'restrain oneself'; Latin 'Jejunium'; Greek 'nesteia'; Hebrew 'toasm' ) is the word used for total or partial abstinence from food for a definite period.[2] That means fast is the period in which the quantity of food taken is reduced. Sometimes it also means to be away from pleasure and social festivities. The word fast was commonly used to mean abstinence from sin by the early Christian Church. But in general fasting now signifies complete abstinence from food and drink, and sometimes this word denotes the somewhat restricted use of a food or drink. But fasting should not be confused with the avoidence of certain foods or drinks as being harmful. For example, a patient is required to take nothing before a surgical operation or babies are not given certain food and drink completely or they are given only certain foods and drinks prescribed for their age and health. Thus food and drink restrictions from a health point of view shonld never be confused with fasting, such as prohibition of sugar for a patient of diabetes. Further food tabus also should not be taken as fasts, such as the Jewish tabu on pork, the staunch Hindu tabu on cow, the Muslim tabu on boar, the food tabus of Polynesian chiefs, and the vegetarianism of the high caste Hindu.

Not only do human beings pass through the process of birth and rebirth but nature also is subject to renovation or rebirth at intervals, in whole or in part, i e., seasons, droughts, rains, earthquakes, etc. We find ceremonies concerned with all these renovations in nature. Some are seasonal ceremonies, such as at the

2. Chamber's Encylopaedia, Vol. 5, P. 598.

time of spring, autumn, etc. Fasting is commonly observed at the occasion of such ceremonies; sometimes at the time of building of a new temple fasting is observed, or sometimes even before a visit to a temple. In the Solomon Islands people who take a sea journey for the first time observe fasting because they have a belief that on a sea journey one will lose his soul and a new one will replace it on his return.[1] Again they observe fasting on the occasion of sowing their fields, since they believe that by observing fast the earth will yield them good crops. Thus we find that fasting preceding the ceremonies which are celebrated for fertility is associated with the power to produce crops and with pregnancy. Fasting, it is believed, is conducive of a condition of fertility. Fasting and austerities in India have supplanted the ritual to which they were originally the preface, and afford power over the gods by whom the prosperity is given. In India the mode of fasting is developed and complicated to an extent unknown elsewhere. But refinements and classifications of fasts have been made; for example, 'Chandrayan Vrat', is a specific designation for reducing from full diet to nothing daily with the reduction in the size of the moon; and again increasing from nothing to a full diet with the increase in size of the moon. Hindus observe fasts (vratas) with great austerity, strictness and severity. Many Hindu ascetics, by going into a trance (the stage suggesting that the soul has passed out of the body) can keep "complete" for incredibly long periods, a practice for which science has yet no answer. The author himself has seen a Hindu ascetic some years ago in Lucknow who had himself buried in deep ditch for a week and who remained there without any air, food or water, the very essentials of life. After a week when the ascetic was taken out of the ditch especially dug for him, he was as hale and hearty as he was before.

Fasting is observed completely or partially and sometimes for longer or shorter periods. It is also generally observed for

1. Ivens, W G., "Island Builders of the Pacific" Philadelphia, 1930. pp. 231

magical purposes for achieving health. For these purposes only certain foods and drinks (which are generally taken in ordinary diets) are avoided completely.

Various may be the purposes of fasting, such as religious, magical, social, customary, and ceremonial, etc. It may be for a preparatory rite before a sacramental or initiational ceremony, or a mourning ceremony, as a purificatory act. It may be an act for inducing visions and dreams, or a technique to add force to the magical rites. Fasting is most commonly found attached to ceremonies such as sacrament, consecration, and sacrifice, and it is always observed before these ceremonies actually take place. Thus the king fasts as he prepares for his installation, a priest fasts for his ordination, the knight fasts for his knight-hood, the initiate for his initiation, the neophyte for baptism, the bride and bridegroom for their marriage. and a young girl for the new life started by her first menses. But a fast is also commonly observed after death in sympathy for the deceased and members of the deceased's family.

**Origins of Fasts:**

As far as the question of the origin of fasting is concerned, it may be quite true that it may have had its origin in different places differently. But behind all this it seems possible and quite logical that fasting did not originate voluntarily as a religious or or magical act, but as enforced necessity. In primitive times to get food was difficult and uncertain, and there were times when man faced scarcity of food or great difficulty in obtaining it. At such times he experienced forced fasting. Thus the mental and physical experiences of primitive man during times of scarcity of food may have led to keeping a fast as a religious act. Such experiences may have come in course of time to suggest the value of voluntary fasting. [1]

1. Enclycopaedia of Religion : A. Eustace Haydon, pp. 272-73.

Prolonged hunger gives rise to visions, or vivid dreams. Thus when men wished to participate in or obtain control over the supernatural, it was necessary to undergo privation, hold to a fast, or festivity to induce ecstacy and have dreams or visions. The recollection of the phenomena accompanying enforced fasting would suggest the observance of fasting with a hope to obtain them. Frequently feast, fast, and festivity are closely related.

Man in course of time came to believe that any act of penance would please or propitiate the supernatural or the higher power, and he did not mind the suffering from fasting, Instead he took it as a satisfaction to himself. In ancient Peru the pilgrim had to observe fasting for twenty days before he was allowed in the sacred Temple of Pachacamae, and he could go to the highest terrace upon which the temple stood only when he had completed one year of fasting. In Istela, New Maxico, a four days ceremonial fasting is observed in which there is complete abstinence from food and drink. While fasting, the faster is strictly prohibited from killing an animal not even a fly or a spider. The man entering the medicine societies must keep away from wheaten dishes and should eat only the cake of blue corn meal, which is made from a wild water-plant and cornmeal tamale. Zunis also observe fasting. The Chippewa young man must undergo fasting if he wants to secure his spiritual animal companion, or monition in a vision. By fast and vision, the faster is stimulated psychologically and becomes susceptible to religious ecstacy, and his sensitiveness to the supernatural is enhanced. [2]

Again, fasting as a rite of mourning may have originated in two ways. Firstly man when he is very melancholic and nervous or seriouly distressed, is incapable of taking any food—and this very fact might have become a traditional mourning rite. Secondly, it might have originated from a true desire to suffer

2. Wilson D. Wallis : Religion in Primitive Society p. 172 : F C. Crofts & Co. N.Y. 1939.

pain and to show sympathy towards the deceased and the members of the deceased's family.

Sometimes, certain foods and drinks are avoided, as they are harmful. This very fact of avoidence might have been accepted as disciplinary action. Or a man might keep an extensive and prolonged fast in order to earn the reward by giving a demonstration of unusual vitality and powers; for instance, among the Algonquin Indians, to be able to fast long is an enviable distinction. (Tylor). Lastly, as already shown, the fasting may help to solve the problem of scarcity of food and this might have been regarded as a magical way of increasing the latter, the abstinence from food being now more strictly observed. The above suggested origins of fasting may be accepted as definite in the lower stages of culture, but at the higher stages of culture fasting is strictly an ascetic act of self-discipline or of propitiation.[1]

By the foregoing discussion, we can see clearly that fasting has been almost a universal practice, particularly among lower cultures and races, although there are exceptions to this. For example, Beardmore says of the natives of Mowat, New Guinea, that they never observe fasts. But exceptions are very few.

**Purposes of Fasting.**

We can not name any single cause as the origin of fast or fasting. W. R. Smith says that fasting is "primarily nothing more than a preparation for the sacramental eating of holy flesh". Tylor explains it as a "means of producing ecstacy and other morbid exaltations or religious ends". Herbert Spencer[2] is of the opinion that the sacrifice of food to the deceased causes a lack of food and so produces hunger, and that fasting arises as a necessary result of sacrifice.

1. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics : Vol. 5. pp. 759-760.
2. Herbert Spencer : Principles of Sociology, 1876. I, p. 285.

Although the nature of the origin of the practice of fasting is very complex, it is true to say that fasting as a strictly penitential discipline was the development of a later stage. But again, all the higher cultures and religions do not accept fasting as a penitential discipline.

As has been already stated there may be various purposes for fasting. Let us now survey the various types and purposes of fasting which have religious sanctity and sanction. We must know that among different cultures and religions, fasting is observed for different and various purposes; not only that, but in a single culture or religion the fast is kept for various purposes Moreover a particular fast may have changed in religious value at different times. Thus we say that it will not be correct to suppose that the religious value of any one type of fast is constant in all cases that admit of being placed in that particular class.

**1. Preparatory Rite or Purificatory Fasting.**

It was a common belief in savage societies that the evil influence of food enters into a man and spoils or defiles him. The abstinence from food, i.e., fasting would avoid every possibility of the contagion or the evil influence of food and in any case render the body void of impurities,. Thus this very belief in practice was resorted to as a ritual preparation and as a purificatory act. In this way the initiation of a boy. entrance of a girl to the membership of adult society, entrance to sacred societies, entering the marriage bond, etc,- are preceded by fasting, particularly in lower cultures, The idea behind all this is that body and soul should be kept pure by keeping away from food and drinks. For example, Egyptians fasted and performed oblations before entering a temple. [1] Among Hindus and Jains the fast is observed before all religious ceremonies, having the same idea of purification in view. In the cult of Isis fasting was observed

1. Wildemann : Religion of Ancient Egypt, 1897; p. 206.

before sacrifice, also for the purpose of purity. Similarly the sorceror among the Lapps prepares himself by observing the fast for the offering of a sacrifice. [1] W.R. Smith, as already shown, explains fasting as "a preparation for the sacramental eating of holy flesh."

**2. Fasting in Sympathy or an Act of Mourning:**

Fasting on the occasion of death is of a complex nature although the origin of this type of fasting has been explained on various grounds. The practice of fasting may be associated with the sacrifice involved in making provision for the deceased, it may have to do with food, it may be purificatory, it may be a practice contrary to normal and ordinary actions and intended to sever connection with the dead; but this practice, without doubt, in most cases is to be regarded as an expression of grief, and as a conventionalizad practice arising out of the actual starvation consequent upon the destruction of, or sacrifice of food stuffs at a death. [2] Westermarck is of the opinion that the origin of this practice may be seen in the fear of swallowing food polluted with the contagion of death—the custom of not preparing or eating food in a house where there is a dead body. Among Hindus the idea of pollution is still very prevalent. In addition to the above reasons, it is also likely that actual grief, making mourners indifferent to the pangs of hunger, may have given rise to fasting as a conventional sign of mourning. The practice of such sympathetic fasting becomes recurrent in the case of a saint, deity, or a great man who has conferred benefits and is to be duly honoured. Thus March 24 was observed as a day of fasting and mourning in the ritual of Mater Magna, in memory of the mother's grief for Attis. Among Muslims the Shia people commemorate the martyrdom of Ali and his two sons, Hasan and Hussain, and similarly among the Christians the observence of Lent is greatly inspired by the

1. G. Von Duben : Our Lappland och Lapparne, Stochholm, 1873, p, 256
2. Herbert Spencer : Principles of Sociology : i :, p- 285.

thought of fellowship with Christ in His suffering during the 40 days in the wilderness and during the events leading to His death. ( Jesus Christ began his public ministry by a fast of forty days in the desert, a time of spiritual preparation and of facing the temptations attendant on the exercise of his messianic functions) Among Hindus, the practice of fasting until the food of various varieties is offered to the Brahmins is very common. This practice lasts for fifreen days in the month of Asvin every year in the memory and sympathy of ancestors. The main idea behind this practice is to get rid of the debt of forefathers. This fortnight is commonly known as ' Pitra Paksha.'

In refering to the practice of fasting on a death, it is of great interest to notice the fear to swallow food polluted with the contagion of death or to swallow food a revengeful ghost has influenced or the practice observed that in many cases those who have killed a man must fast, as well as perform other purificatory rites.

**3. Penitential Fasting or Fasting as an Act of Penitence:**

Sometimes those who have committed sins realize their acts of wrong doing and are sincere in repenting of them. In the minds of the wrong doers who suffer or anticipate the punishment of their sins as convicted by their conscience, fasting serves as a means to attest to the genuineness of their repentence, to turn aside the wrath of the gods, and either to forestall and cancel or ease the rate of punishment, or to denote a readiness to accept whatever is right. It is an expression of a truly contrite heart, and it is associated with prayers and supplications and sometimes with strong cries and tears. The faster suffers pain, and he may well have to think that by so suffering he would humiliate himself before gods who (he believes) are angry with him and would thus get their pity. Fasting as a penitential act is commonly associated with prayers, etc., and the relations between fasting as a penitential act and fasting as a more or less magical method of

forcing the hands of the gods is perhaps to be seen at the lower levels of culture.

It is a belief among Tsimshians that through strict fasting the deity can be forced to fulfill their wishes. And in accordance with this belief they will abstain from food for seven days and remain prone in bed.[1] Similarly the Indians of Colombia went on fasting for several days and observed continence whenever they desired to gain the assistance and help from their dieties.[2] Again among the Mexicans penitential fasting was prevalent and it was observed to purify the conscience; it varied much in extent from one to several days or years, and was observed either by an individual or by the whole nation on a particular occasion, usually imposed by the priest after due confession of sins or of specific offences.[3] Penitential fasting (either occasionally or at a fixed time) serves to ward off sins; it was recognised in Egypt. Among Babylonians penitential fasting was a regular ritual act of penance accompanied with mourning expressions of wrong doing.[4] We find also penitential fasting among Hebrews from comparatively early times.

Muhammadanism also recognizes penitential fasting which is highly commended by Muhammad himself. Muslim's holy book, 'Quran', suggests a three day penitential fasting on a pilgrimage, and for seven days on the return. ( ii 193 ). The person of Muslim faith must keep a fast for two months if he kills another person of his own faith ( iv 94 ) and on the breach of an oath, the breaker who can not as a penance feed ten poor men must fast for three days. ( v 91 ). Among the Muslim fasts, the chief one is the Ramadan fast of 30 days, which is strictly and rigorously observed, in which even water is not allowed between dawn and sun-set. The 13th, 14th and 15th days

1. Boas in Fazor : Totemism, III, p,, 317.
2. Ternaux - Compuas : 'Essai sur 1' anc, Cundinamarca, Paris, 1842, p.44 f.
3. Clavigaro : History of Maxico, 1780 i, p. 397 ff,; Torquemada; Monarchia Indians, Madrid, 1723, ii, p, 212 f,
4. Zimmern : Babylonian Busspsalmen, Leipzig, 1885, p, 34,

of each month are recognized as days of fasting 'Ashura'; the 10th of the month of Muharram also is a day of fasting because Muhammad said he hoped it would cover the sins of the coming year. Although Islam is not an ascetic religion, the value of fasting as a good work of discipline is very well recognized by it. Among Hindus also, several fasts ( vratas ) are prescribed for persons desiring to repent for their sins and misdeeds. These are known as 'Prayashchit Vratas'.

( To be continued )

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# Difficulties in the Way of the Mutual Appreciation of Western and Eastern Spiritual Values, and Suggestions to Overcome Them

*Prof. Henry H. Presler, Ph,D.*

The proposition of this paper may be stated thus : Difficulties in the way of mutual appreciation of spiritual values in two or more cultures in contact, are a normal condition of mankind, and may be regarded as natural from the standpoint of the social sciences. Once this proposition is granted, the individual relaxes within, and views both cultures objectively and from the standpoint of differences. These differences become opportunities for further spiritual quest in the realm of values. The task of this paper is to illustrate the proposition from the cultures of America and India.

## I

That two or more distinct cultural patterns in contact normally experience strain, is a proposition that will be readily granted by listeners familiar with social psychology, collective behavior, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Each of these sciences of human behavior has a considerable literature. Differing cultures in contact have been described for all five continents of the world, and exhibit similar reactions, namely, tension, alienation, difficulty, which vary with the degree of difference between their basic value systems. This kind of human behavior is so common, so generally prevalent. that the social scientists reverted to the foundational Latin language to invent a term for it, namely, ethnocentrism. Pick up any standard textbook in the aforementioned social sciences. and read a common description of the phenomenon. Here is one from a college textbook published in 1960 in London :

*Ethnocentrism is the partly conscious but largely unconsious tendency, when one comes in to contact with " foreigners " (bearers of any strange cultural patterns), to take the culture of one'e own group as the basis of one's emotional reactions, cognitive assessments, and aesthetic and moral judgments. Areas in which ethnocentric responses are likely to be particularly strong..... (include) religion (spiritual values). Being ignorant of the inner meaning and total context of what we see among strangers, we misinterpret, project our own feelings or wishes inappropriately, or judge with naive harshness or naive approval. (Brackets mine)-.* [1]

The phenomenon of ethnocentrism (with its attendant manifestations) is so firmly established in scientifie treatises, and must be so familiar to this learned audience, that I need not dwell on it. My conclusion is that Occident and Orient should expect subjective difficulties in the way of appreciating one anothers spiritual values, and not be alarmed, annoyed or tense about them. To deny there are difficulties between any two differing cultures in the way of mutual appreciation, is unnecessary. To say "Ham sab, jo is kamare men baithe hue hain, ek hi brauderie men hain," [2] is not only false sociologically speaking, but may even be insincere. To worry about difficulties of mutual appreciation is as futile as worrying about occasional set-backs in weather. To be relaxed about them and interested in defining the differences more accurately is the mark of a university education. We can make the exploration of them mutually illuminating, which is the next step to appreciating them.

## II

What kind of differences exist between Western and Eastern spiritual values ? There are differences of definition,

1. H M. Jonhson, SOCIOLOGY, A Systematic Introduction (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd , 1960), p. 106.
2. All of us, seated in this room, are blood brothers and of one culture.

differences of focus, and differences in the expression of values. Let us consider each in that order.

A. By differences in definitions of values, is meant any two constrasting cultures do not define the good, the true and the beautiful in identical terms. To indicate the shades of definition would require an analysis of the oral and written literatures of both American and India. To my knowlege, such an analysis ( in detail ) is not in print. There are Indians in America today who are studying our values, and there are Americans like me who have spent the last twenty-four years studying your values, and there are other scholars on both sides of the world who are competent to write such. But for this paper, a listing of definitional differences is not required, because such differences are not creating serious barriers to mutual understanding. Differences of definition are not causing misunderstanding from the side of Americans for the simple reason that 99% of my people have not made a study of India's spiritual values. They do not know much about the goals of Hindustan. There are several reasons for their ignorance of the heritage of India. For one thing America has never had a colonial system requiring participation of administrators in the societies of the East. Most of our people have no occasion to learn an Oriental language, or to become acquainted even from a cantonment with the life and thought of the peoples of the East. Their interest in foreign languages has been limited to their own heritage : to Greek, Latin, French, German, and somewhat to Spanish. Without Sanskrit and one of the Indian vernaculars ( preferably Hindi ) it is doubtful if any American can obtain a sufficient grasp of the spiritual values of India. But even translations into English of Indian works are seldom read by Americans. Their newspapers give scant attention to Eastern spiritual values. In consquence, my people really do not know of the values on this side of the world, and consequently neither appreciate nor depreciate them on the score of definition.

It is likely that most English-reading Indians know far more about American values, than vice versa. University-trained Indians are bilingual and are, in fact being introduced to the spiritual values of England through their schools. Everybody knows that the reaction of Indians to Western spiritual values is a mixed one, and the amount of appreciation thereof may be safely estimated by you. My own impression may be hazarded, namely, that there has been more appreciation than depreciation within your university circles. My point is that from the side of 99% of Americans, differences of definition are not causing ethnocentric reactions because American do not know what Indian values are.

There is a problem in definition still more fundamental. The Westerner in the major Greco-Roman-Christian tradition knows what his highest spiritual values are. The Easterner in the major Upanishadic-Mahayana Budhistic-Vedantic tradition knows he can not know what his highest spiritual values are. To such a Westerner, spiritual values are resident in the concretized forms of material achievements, moral codes, philosophic systems and institutionalized religion. To such an Easterner, the highest spiritual values are above and beyond the thoughts and institutions of men; they are absolutely *sui generis*, separate, unique, without a second. They cannot be intellectualized. felt or willed; they can only be realized. Religion, to this eastern tradition, is earthbound, meager, inept, useful only in the beginning stages as preparation for the more strenuous intermediate development to follow. In the later stages, the language of religions and philosophy cannot be used at all, and their forms must be sloughed off. Spiritual values are neither knowable nor expressible, and such an Indian knows that he knows them not. The Westerner knows his spiritual values as embodied in and exhibited by existing forms, like a book, a dogma, an institution, a person, etc. etc., and he knows them. For the Westerner to appreciate as yet unknowable spiritual

values is difficult, and for an Easterner to appreciate such values encased in mundane forms is equally difficult,

In sum, here is a situation in which most Americans do not know what Indian's spiritual values are, and who, on trying to learn of them, are told by the major tradition that such are actually unknowable. In the same situation are Indians being told that spiritual values are completely and perfectly known in, for example, a Person. The two groups find themselves talking past each other.

B. This brings me to differences of focus. By focus is meant the convergence of attention at a particular point among other points. When we think of "focus" we think of many possible spots to which attention could be directed, and of a chosen spot upon which sight is to be concentrated. Thus, it is said by competent scholars of the snbject, that the West tends to focus upon the kind of spiritual values called ethics, and this may be the reason that the M. A. Philosphy syllabi of some Indian universities propose textbooks written by Westerners rather than by Easterners. The former have focused their attention upon the so-called science of ethics, whereas the latter have distributed their attention over a number of points, including spiritual experience and devotion. Nobody says that the West lacks spiritual experience, or that the East lacks ethics It is merely a question of focus. The West is said to lay stress on morality, and the East upon mystical realization. In a nut-shell, the West focuses its attention upon *karma*, and the East divides its attention between *karma* (works), *gyan* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion) and *yoga*(discipline). In detail, the Western focus upon ethical values is supposed to stem from the Semitic races (Arabians, Hebrews, Jews etc.). The Semites are credited with four emphases upon moral values, namely, Zorastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, each of which is heavily weighted with commandments. The scriptures of the Semitic religions give many pages to codifying

their morals, and make salvation largely dependent upon conduct in accord with them. No doubt faith, devotion and grace have their places in the Semitic religions, but a disinterested appraiser thereof will be impressed by the focus on morals. The Westerner is thus predisposed to believe that his spritual destiny depends largely upon obedience to ethical norms. The Easterner, on the other hand. divides his attention between moral demands (under the heading of *karma*, and *gyan*, *bhakti*, and *yoga*. The Vedanta, indeed. goes to the extent of urging that ethical values are but the introduction to a higher way which is beyond good and evil. While the intellectually elite are heavily influenced by the Vedanta position, the mass of Indians probably do not go to such an extreme with respect to moral values, and divide their attention between the four ways named. This division of attention has not satisfied all Indians, as is illustrated by the efforts of Hinayana Buddhism and Jainism to narrow the distribution. The effort of the Buddha to stress moral values, and the actual focus of Jainism thereon, are well-known to this learned audience, as are the efforts of the early Hindu Alwars of Tamilnad and of certain Hindu Maratha saints to do the same. But Buddhism has almost disappeared from India as an organized institution, and Jainism remains a small sect. The hymns of the Hindu bhagats are influential in restricted areas but not generally. The theory that moral values are not the sum of spirituality is an implication of the writings of Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and others in the most influential tradition, and has been generally accepted by the masses, so that attention is divided among the four ways, rather than focused on the one way.

I observe that this difference of focus is an important hindrance to mutual appreciation, especially from the side of the Westerner. He cannot imagine why anything should be more important than his double-entry bookkeeping system pretending to guarantee absolute honesty, his time-clock supposed to assure absolute punctuality, his medicine kit proclaiming antiseptic

purity, or his Rotary Club expecting to practiee absolute goodwill. He is shocked by aspects of the Indian economic social and religious patterns that include other than ethical values. If we remind the American that his society has the highest recorded divorce rate as well as a very high rate of recorded arrests for crime, which facts are inconsistent with his ethical theory, or, if we remark that the religious functionaries described in the first half of his scriptures were born to the job and were not always model characters, he replies that these data merely illustrate the fact of sin. The point is that the American mind is supercharged with moral values because such have been in the focus of his tradition.

Some Indians tend to absorb the West's somewhat narrow attention to ethical values, as particular Hindu sects have shown, and as recent political documents illustrate. The sectarians remain numerically few, and the government is now making a strenuous endeavor to encourage the people to give closer attention to certain social values. Consequently, it is easier for more Indians to appreciate the West's emphasis upon ethics, than for Americans to appreciate the East's distribution of attention between *karma*, *gyan*, *bhakti* and *yoga*. Meanwhile, the mass of India's people are giving at least comparable attention to spriitual union with Deity.

If, as proposed, America tends to narrow upon ethical values, whereas India tends to distribute its attention over several kinds of values, then it is easy to understand how mutual appreciation might be endangered. All manner of subjective reactions might arise within the mind of the other, and lead to ethnocentric behavior. It is my observation that they not only might arise, but do arise, and constitute a serious block to mutual appreciation.

C, By far the most serious obstruction to mutual appreciation remains to be mentioned in the third section of this paper' namely, in the expression of spiritual values. The West expresse spiritual values through codes and creeds, the East through disciplin-

ed intropection; the West expresses values in the context of flux and change, the East in the context of stability; the West expresses spiritual values with guarded moderation, the East with total commitment; the West expresses them while horizontally and vertically mobile, the East while fixed in one locus and status; the West makes conduct the fruit of expression, the East makes philosophy the seed-bed for expression; the West uses art to express spiritual values through mundane forms, the East uses art to express spiritual values through extra-mundane forms; the West expresses its values with the sanction of science, the East expresses them independently of science. Thus, in expressing spiritual values, West and East contrast in at least seven ways. My contention is, that more significant than the definitions of spiritual values, more serious than the amount of attention focused on moral values, is this third hazard to mutual appreciation, namely, the antithetical expressions thereof. Kindly allow me to deal with each alternative briefly, with special reference to America and India.

1. The West expresses its spiritual values through codes, the East through the discipline of introspective striving. This means that the West tends to fix its values in rigid definitions, narrow and clear; the East undergoes searching disciplines to realize Value and expects to find out the nature of Value after experiencing It. Preliminary definitions are not so important. It makes a world of difference whether one regards his values as already known and sharply defined, or as a realm of Being to be known later after successfully completing a discipline. For a person at one end of the alternative to appreciate the viewpoint of a friend at the other end, is not easy.

2. The West considers spiritual values subject to modification within different contexts and under varying conditions, and even makes change *per se* a spiritual achievement. The West is near to regarding modification and change.....any kind of change..... as good, indeed, a sign of progress. Change in this connection

usually means the substitution of one given value for another, so that our political history, for example, follows a pendulum movement in which first one value ( such as individualism ) and then another value ( such as group-ism ) is preferred. This keeps the society in a state of unrest, like boiling water. It has almost come to the point where the worth of a Westerner increases with the amount of alteration he causes. Many an American goes abroad for the sole purpose of trying to change his hosts' culture and does not trouble himself to appraise the values maintained by their existing order. The East, on the contrary, makes adherence to unchanging and undisturbable values not only a duty but an expectancy. "Jaise hamare bap-dadonne kiya, waise hi ham bhi karte hain."[3] This results in the Westerner failing to appreciate what he calls the fixity of the Orient, and the Easterner decrying what he calls the rashness of the Occident.

3. The West makes moderate expression of values a sign of successful adjustment, and abhors fanaticism. The East regards extreme behavior with respect to values, a symptom of indwelling divinity and suspects the fanatic of godhood. America, for example, abandoned its conventional moderation for a few short years by making extreme adherence to sobriety a legal requirement under Prohibition, but soon reverted to type. India continues to advocate Prohibition, at least in theory. The Westerner wants to be good, but not so good as to be queer, to be religious but not too religious, and shuns the enthusiast. The American thinks that a man has somehow become mentally unbalanced who sells all he has and gives to the poor and turns to follow his guru. It is a difference between moderate and extreme expressions of values.

4. The Westerner is, in commercial language, a salesman, travelling here and there to peddle his merchandise. He is continually subject to transfer over the surface of the earth, and seeks promotions up the economic and social ladders. He

3. As did our forefathers, so do we.

crosses the seas to bring the values of education to underdeveloped countries, plys one trade to pay expenses while learning another, and struggles to rise higher. He rushes here and there, and consider his rapid movements themselves a value. But the Easterner admires the man who is stationary in locus and status, fulfilling the duty or *dharma* of his fixed position. The Easterner feels uneasy and annoyed by the foreigners' shuttling back and forth, and is bewildered by his disturbing activities, regarding him as an agitator and sometimes as vain and shallow. Mutual appreciation becomes difficult.

5. The Westerner tries to express spiritual values through individual and social conduct, the Easterner through philosophy. But to the Westerner, philosophy is used to define the "facts" of human existence. Most Westerners think that philosophy is concerned with Truth and not with values ( with some exceptions ). The Eastern philosopher who uses philosophy to realize union with the Source of Value finds difficulty in appreciating the use of philosophy for so utilitarian and mudane a purpose as to arrive at a Worldview.

6. In both West and and East art is a medium for expressing values. The central stream of Western art originated with the Greeks, and has developed a high regard for copying symetrical and balanced specimens from real life. The East regards art as symbolic of spiritual values, so that its pictures and statues need not correspond with mundane forms, but with the values themslves. The Westerner standing before a human form possessed of more limbs and heads than occur with normal individuals, experiences a mental block. When art forms vary, mutual appreciation is difficult. When art variations express spiritual values, then it is difficult for two cultures to appreciate one another's values.

7. In the West religion did provide the sanction for values. But recently science and empiricism have made belief in theism

difficult, and therefore the spiritual values maintained by the old theism have been shaken. But in the Orient. science merely describes the outer shell or impermanent manifestation of the all, and therefore fails to shake basic values, The Westerner may regard the Oriental complacency regarding values, as a sign of unawareness of the implications of modern knowledge. The well-educated Easterner may consider Western scepticism as unnecessary and unjustified. The two cannot get together on values because they doubt each other's intellectual premises

In sum, the ways of expressing values differ markedly between the West and the East. It is a question of code or career, of a pendulum or a pillar, of moderation or extremism, of mobility or immobility, of conduct or philosophy, of the kind of art, and of the relevance of science. These contrasting ways of expressing values are more obvious than the values themselves, and become the major road blocks to unimpeded appreciation.

## III

I now reach the last part of this assignment: Suggestions for Overcoming the Difficulties in the Way of the Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Spiritual Values.

As to the difficulties arising because of the American's ignorance of India's spiritual values, the remedy is, of course, information. The number of indologists in the U.S.A. is increasing, universities are establishing new departments of Southeast Asia Area Studies, and a few have begun teaching Hindi. The Technical Assistance Program is bringing more Americans to India than ever before, and more Indians have gone to my country for higher studies, and to lecture, than at any time in history. The periodic visits of your respected government leaders to America, and their appearance there on radio and television networks, have brought a new awareness of India to the other side of the globe. Your own Delhi Orientation Centre for introducing Westerners to some features of Indian life and thought, is a step in the right direction. Knowledge of each other is certainly on the increase.

As to the difficulties arising because of the varying focus towards moral values, and because of the different ways of expressing all spiritual values, the only relief known to me is the one suggested at the outset. Each observer should overcome ethnocentric reactions within himself. Differences between the West and the East are among the cultural facts of the present world situation. We need to regard them as normal, and relax There are differences between the North and the South, between the Temperate Zone peoples and the Torrid Zone peoples, and what of it ? There are also differences between flowers, and the wise man is he who drinks in the beauty of each specie of blossom and lets its fragrance pervade his home.

**Tirukural** *( dated about 400 A. D, )*

A New Translation by R. D. Immanuel.

Chapter 63

**Stout—Heartedness.**

1 If difficulties surround you rejoice; for nothing else ( i. e. other than rejoicing ) will help as much.

2 The overwhelming flood of difficulties disappear, when one remembers that they are what he thinks them to be.

3 He who makes it difficult for difficulties to encounter him will have no difficulties.

4 Difficulties will find it difficult to encounter the man who has the persistency of an ox that pulls the cart through all the difficult roads.

5 Difficulties will find it hard to attack a man whose heart is not agitated by overwhelming difficulties.

6 Will they who scoff at wealth and do not care to keep it feel sad if they become poor ?

7 The wise are not agitated because they know the body is for suffering.

8 He who does not desire pleasure for his body and realizes that suffering is natural will not suffer.

9 He who is not elated by pleasures will not be depressed by suffering.

10 Even his enemies will praise the man who is happy while suffering,

## Chapter 64

## Ministry.

( The next ten chapters deal with the qualifications and traits of a person who would serve as a minister to a king )

1 The framing of policies and their implementation including the timing as well as supplying of accessories belong to the ministry.

2 The minister should have four traits, viz., fearlessness, ability to protect people, discernment, and executive ability.

3 The minister should be able to separate ( from his enemies their ) friends and prevent his own friends ( from joining the enemies ) also to reconcile parties estranged ( from himself ).

4 The minister should be able to investigate, devise means of investigation, and make bold decisions,

5 The suitable helper should know what is right, understand the situation, should have quiet of calm words and the skill to work always.

6 What force can withstand the man who is talented as well as learned ?

7 For executive ability knowledge of the human situation must supplement book learning.

8 Ministers should give sound advice even if the king is incapable of receiving advice and has no sense of his own.

9 Better it is to live with 7,000,000 enemies than with one bad minister.

10 Those who have no executive skill fail even after planning wisely.

## Chapter 65.

### The Power of the Tongue.

1 The benefits of the power of the tongue is not iucluded in other benefits. ( that is, it is more. )

2 Since words can bring about prosperity or adversity, one should be diligent to guard his words.

3 That whieh makes those that hear spell bound and those that do not hear long to hear is called SPEECH.

4 Speak, Knowing the power of words. There is no greater virtue or wealth.

5 Speak in such a way that you cannot be challenged.

6 The glory of the faultless is to speak pleasingly and hear understandingly.

7 It is very difficult to conquer one who is brave and mighty in words.

8 The world hastens to ask "What is his profession ?" of the man who can speak pleasingly, precisely, and succinctly.

9 Those who are unable to express clearly and briefly, desire to speak at length.

10 Those who are not able to communicate their knowledge are scentless flowers in a garland.

## Chapter 66.

### Purity of Action

1 Help can heap wealth only ; but purity of action brings about every good.

2 Eschew actions that do not bring about praise and good results.

3 Those who desire progress mnst refrain from actions producing evil.

4 Steady-sighted men will not resort to meanness even under dire neccessities.

5 Do nothing for which you might have to repent later. If once you have done it, do it no more.

6 Rather let your mother go hungry, than do a thing which the virtuous despise.

7 The poverty of virtue is superior to wealth got illicitly.

8 Even if successful (now) forbidden ways bring about evil results ultimately.

9 That which one gets out of the tears of others will bring him tears ; that which was aquired by fair means, even if it is lost, will bring about good results.

10 Getting wealth by cheating and adulteration is like storing water in an unbaked clay vessel.

# Book Review

*Pandit A. M. Srinvasachariar* ; **Upakhyanamala**

( Madras Natesan & Co. ) pp. 375.

Tho subtitle "A garland of stories" (or illustrations) gives the meaning of the Sanskrit word Upakhyanamala. Here about a dozen stories taken from the epics-mostly from the Mahabharata, are told in the words of the poets themselves. An English translation, verse by verse, is also given. Of course the original is printed in Devanagari script. These are the most popular stores of the Ithihasas and many Hindu boys and girls have heard these repeated to them by their mothers as bedtime stories.

This book can be evaluated from many different angles. As a book of stories it is excellent. A story is an end in itself and nothing more is needed than the pleasure of reading or hearing stories. Considered from this point of view these stories have excellent testimony because for thousands of years they have been repeated and little children hear them with immense delight.

To students studying Sanskrit here are selections from the epics with translations to help them in difficult places. They will find it handy, helpful and interesting.

To the orthodox Hindu these stories are part and parcel of his sacred scriptures. He divides his religious literature into two kinds, primary or revealed called Sruti and secondary or remembered (from traditions) called smrtti. These stories belong to the second category. In all fairness to the author (or translator) it must be stated that he has not attempted to give an exegesis or to point out theological doctrines arising from them. But in the words of Sir

C. P R. Iyer the publishers have given their ideas concerning the problem of interpretation. Here are some of his words :—" Those stories, epilogues and parables are not put together for rhe purpose of furnishing a chronological and textually accurate history of the times but are designed to illustrate and enforce fundamental religious and ethical doctrines by means of apt examples....It has been a favourite diversion of some critics of the type of Macaulay to ridicule the geography of the Puranas or their historical authenticity and to accuse them of gross exaggeration and distortion. It cannot be denied that historical and geographical accuracy is frequently sacrificed to poetic or rhetoric effect in this species of literature and that to point a particular moral there is very often an overemphasis of a special virtue as in the cases of Sobi, or Karna or Harischandra. This however is a frequent phonomenon and in arriving at final judgements on innate values, it would be foolish to lay stress on the patent difficulties, geographical, biological and historical, presented."

Another view dismissed by the publishers is the esoteric interpretation of the Puranas. Says Iyer, " Few will agree with students of the Puranas and Gospels of the old world who adopt an esoteric interpretation in respect of every story or incident. Some there have been who assert that the seven Dvipas or islands referred to in the Puranas are the seven Prakrities, that the salt sea surrounding the Jambudweepa is the ocean of worldly miseries, that Benares or Kasi is the Annachakra, the spot between the eyebrows, and that Ganga. Yamuna, and Sarasvathi are the three Nadis. To pursue this path is to miss the essential human quality and appeal of this great literature," But to the readers of India Cultures Quarterly who agree with Dr. Presler's conclusions arrived at in his studies of the Mid-India region, these stories will give a mine of information.

## NOTICE

Our procedure with respect to renewals may be explained for the mutual benefit of magazine and subscriber.

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Subscriptions to addresses in India are automatically renewed unless the reader informs us in advance. The renewal is sent V. P. P.. after first having sent the subscriber a printed notice to expect the same. Some subscribers, on receiving the expiration notice send us their subscription fees by Money Order which is appreciated by us and saves V. P P. charges. But the time factor sometimes creates confusion. The subscriber may send his subscription to us about the same time we are mailing out the current issue, so that the two cross in the mails. On the one hand, we receive the Money Order, and on the other hand the subscriber receives the V. P. P. Some subscribers have thus paid twice, and we are sorry for this inconvenience to them. In this case, we enter their subscription for two years. Others have refused the V. P. P. because of having sent their Money Order, which is proper to do.

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